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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 006485

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [ETTC](#) [MNUC](#) [IN](#) [IR](#) [NSSP](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: NATWAR RESERVED ON US-INDIA NUCLEAR UNDERSTANDING

REF: STATE 150160

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Foreign Minister Natwar Singh was oddly aloof on the US-India nuclear understanding when the Ambassador met with him August 23 to convey the Secretary's letter designating Undersecretary Burns as the US interlocutor for the civil nuclear working group established in the July 18 joint statement (reftel). The Ambassador offered congratulations on the GOI's successful navigation of the recent Parliamentary debate over the PM's US visit, and underlined the President and Secretary Rice's shared commitment to achieving the full potential of our bilateral relationship. The Ambassador also raised PSI, noting our hope that New Delhi will respond to the disbanding of the Core Group by subscribing to the Statement of Interdiction Principles and taking part in the PSI Indian Ocean interdiction exercise to be hosted by the UK in November.

2. (C) Without giving any hint as to who will be Undersecretary Burns' counterpart, Natwar acknowledged that he had received reports of strong resistance from certain elements on Capitol Hill, and observed that India's situation is relatively easier, since none of the steps the GOI must take require legislative ratification. The Ambassador flagged the upcoming EU-India summit as a chance for India to make its case to the European members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Natwar confirmed that the GOI has thus far made no third-country approaches to sell the July 18 framework, but did point out that PM Blair has already spoken supportively of the US-India understanding. On Proliferation Security, Natwar noted positively a recent Parliamentary question in which the GOI indicated that it was looking at PSI, but did not commit to specific timing for completion of PSI negotiations.

3. (C) Natwar indicated that he (and Foreign Secretary Saran) would be in the US from September 13-25 in connection with the Prime Minister's September 13-14 appearance at UNGA (Natwar will also go to Ottawa). The Minister did not, however, indicate any intention to use the UNGA visit to engage with others on India's civil nuclear plans. Pressed by the Ambassador regarding continued grumbling from the scientific community about the requirement to separate India's civilian and military establishments, Natwar claimed there was no division of opinion, citing recent interviews by Atomic Energy Chairman Khakodkar as evidence that the scientists are on board. "I don't see any problem on our side," the Minister concluded.

4. (C) The Ambassador also raised the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons program, and our hope that India will use its influence in Tehran and Vienna to support the EU-3 effort. Natwar reported that he will travel to Tehran September 2 in order to "get to know the new set up." He noted that Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki had lived in Bangalore for several years as a student, adding that his new counterpart has placed a high priority on relations with New Delhi. The Ambassador returned to our need for India's assistance in bringing Iran into compliance with its NPT obligations, noting that this issue could play into Congressional debate over the US-India nuclear understanding. "Yes," Natwar replied, we can help, underlining that he was going to Tehran in an exploratory mode.

5. (C) Comment: The Minister seemed oddly aloof on this set of issues, in contrast to his much more passionate and engaged presentations on Bangladesh and Pakistan (septel). Some of this may be a function of the prolonged Parliamentary session, with its bruising debate over the PM's agenda with the US. But it was also clear that the GOI has not yet made its decisions about who will be Undersecretary Burns' counterpart for the important negotiations that lie ahead. Hopefully the Secretary's letter will help to accelerate this decision. End Comment.

MULFORD